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Andersen Retires as Cornell University's Stone Fruit Breeder; Program Will Continue

By N. Abbott and L. McCandless

GENEVA, NY: Robert L. Andersen, director of Cornell University's stone fruit breeding and evaluation program and professor of horticultural sciences at the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station (NYSAES) in Geneva, NY, is retiring after more than 40 years as a plant breeder. Andersen will pass aspects of the stone fruit program to three other members of the horticultural sciences department at Geneva. Courtney A. Weber will work with plums and apricots, Susan K. Brown will assume responsibility for the cherry program, and Terence L. Robinson will assume responsibility for stone fruit production systems, rootstock evaluation and pears.

Weber is assistant professor of horticultural sciences and directs Cornell's small fruit breeding program. He was trained at the University of Florida in stone fruit breeding prior to becoming a berry breeder at Cornell. Brown, who served as Cornell's stone fruit breeder from 1985 to 1991, is professor of horticultural sciences and directs Cornell's apple breeding program. Robinson is associate professor of horticultural sciences and leads Cornell's fruit orchard systems and fruit tree rootstock evaluation program.

"Cornell's sweet cherry breeding program has been gaining momentum over the last five years," said Andersen. "Advances in the development of new varieties, rootstocks, and the control of fruit cracking suggest that growers can produce high quality stone fruits and take advantage of their proximity to East Coast markets. I am very pleased that Susan Brown, Courtney Weber and Terence Robinson have agreed to carry on this effort."

"Bob Andersen has been a tireless and effective advocate for the New York stone fruit industry," said Brown. "He has produced many advanced breeding selections and released several sweet and tart cherry cultivars that are well adapted to New York conditions. We are not able to replace Dr. Andersen, but our continuation of his programs ensures that the Cornell breeding material will be advanced and not lost. My prior knowledge of the program will be helpful as we evaluate the 200-plus cherry selections to decide which

Pictures are linked to hi-res scans



Robert L. Andersen, director of Cornell University's stone fruit breeding and evaluation program and professor of horticultural sciences at the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station (NYSAES) in Geneva, NY, is retiring after more than 40 years as a plant breeder.
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should be discarded, transferred to germplasm collections or other programs, or commercialized," she said.

Fruit breeding and evaluation has been a major focus of the Geneva Experiment Station since its founding in 1880. Over the last 124 years, researchers at Geneva have introduced more than 245 varieties of apples, grapes, berries, and stone fruits, selecting for yield, flavor, winter hardiness, insect and disease resistance and vigor. It can take 10 to 15 years of development and testing before a new fruit variety is ready for commercial release, and another 10 to 15 years before the variety gains name recognition with the public.

Andersen's 40 Years in Horticulture

In recognition of his contributions to horticultural science and the New York fruit industry, Andersen was awarded a lifetime achievement award by the Cornell Fruit Work Team and the NY State Horticultural Society at Cornell's Centennial Fruit Field Days and Equipment Show on July 27.

"Bob Andersen has been an especially important part of the Cornell team that supports the New York fruit industry. He has been a tireless promoter of cherries, peaches, plums, apricots and pears," said Fruit Program Work Team Leader, Terence Robinson.

"Bob has been the reason for the revitalization of the New York stone fruit industry," said stone fruit and apple grower Jim Bittner, who is president of the NY State Horticultural Society. "The varieties he bred and evaluated will form the basis of the industry for many years to come."

Andersen's career in horticulture started as a schoolboy in Reinbeck, Iowa, where he cut asparagus in the evenings for spending money. He received his B.S. in plant science in 1960 from Iowa State University, and spent two years in the Army before receiving his master's degree from Michigan State in 1964, and his Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota in 1971.

Andersen became an associate and then a full professor at Michigan State, where he worked in stone fruit breeding and evaluation from 1974-1980. From 1980-1985, he served as chair of the horticulture department at Clemson University. In 1985, he assumed the chairmanship of Cornell University's department of horticultural sciences at the NYSAES, until 1991, when he became director of Cornell's stone fruit breeding and evaluation program.

While at Cornell, Andersen released 15 varieties of cherries, plums, and peaches, and supervised several graduate students in their research. He has also consulted with fruit breeders and researchers in Australia, China, Egypt, and Europe.

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